

'Being Content'

Good morning everyone, my text this morning is taken from Philippians 4: The apostle Paul writes in verses 11-13; those famous verses which we would all like to aspire to.

"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

I would like to ask you this morning, have you found that 'secret of contentment' in your own life?

The truth is we live in a very discontented world you can see this in so many ways in our modern day society, they say we are in the middle of a house selling boom and the reason (I guess) why so many people are moving house is due to a sense of discontentment a dissatisfaction with what they have already.

They say the average number of years a person remains in a job nowadays, before moving on is 4 years! (Is it just me but I seem to remember when I was younger people often stayed in their same place of work for a very long time, even all their lives?)

Dare I say, also, one of key areas of the collapse of morals in our country is the breakdown of marriage couples do not stay together anymore and one of the reasons for this is a discontentment with each other they believe they can find someone better. The 'grass will be greener the other side of the fence' so to speak.

in fact when we go back to the beginning of creation in the garden of Eden and the story of Adam and Eve we can see at the root of the 'fall of man' was this discontentment with their lot, with the provision that God had given them, they wanted more, they were greedy to eat from the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil' when in truth they had everything they needed already.

There is an ingrained covetousness at the heart of 'man' which wants something he can't have and it is diametrically opposed to a healthy and Godly contentment.

But firstly let's look at the context of these verses from Philippians 4, because what makes these words even more remarkable is;

Paul wrote them in about 62 A.D as he anticipated his release from prison (yes that's right he was in prison!) Things were on a 'knife edge' regarding Christians in the first

century world and there must have been awareness by Paul that at any time he could be facing the executioners axe! Yet he had found this contentment right there in the midst of the most difficult of circumstances.

He says he 'learnt the secret' what secret? And how did he learn it? Obviously through contrasting experiences - and we have a detailed description of these experiences in 2 Corinthians 11:21-38. This is the apostle Paul speaking about himself;

“Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I.

Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.

²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, and I spent a night and a day in the open sea,

²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers.

²⁷ I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸

Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn”?

Paul had certainly 'been through the mill' **he had learned** the 'secret of contentment' a particularly hard way. But is it possible for us to also find that place of contentment? I think it is, but first let's look at some of the barriers to contentment 😊

Firstly there is a subtle teaching that we need to be aware of;

Sometimes in Christian circles you hear things where; you're made to feel '**you are never in the right place**' 'you're never quite where you should be'!!

Now don't get me wrong, I believe there is a 'healthy discontentment' that drives us to know God in a deeper way, **it's not a place of complacency** where we think 'we have arrived' that not the Christianity of the New Testament, where we are told '**to persevere**' to '**make every effort**' – '**to make your calling and election sure**' (2 Peter 1:10)

No, what I'm talking about here is a teaching that's make you feel 'wholly inadequate' it leaves you with a sense of hopelessness, that you will never measure up or 'meet the mark' or that you can't really find God in the station in life He's put you in.

It might sound strange, but are you aware of God in your **present situation your current circumstances?** - not at some point in the future when maybe things are easier, you may be healthier – wealthier, more mature – more educated – delivered from your fears, healed from your 'condition', when you have found a new partner – retired, or are able to put your feet up, or when your families grown up, you've paid all your debts off or a host of other things.

Or indeed do you hark back to old days when you had more going for you; when you were younger – better looking – fitter – less grey hairs – more prospects – more friend's life was more challenging. **The question is are you content where you are now?**

I Heard one of these Christian TV phone in programmes some time ago and a woman who was a shoe sales assistant was having trouble at work with her boss and was finding things difficult - the TV presenter was trying to encourage her, but he said in the process of the conversation - "I am sure God doesn't want you to work in a shoe shop he has a plan for your life you could have a 'major ministry' elsewhere!

Hang on a minute! Can't she have a 'ministry' working in a shoe shop? Can't she find God's grace there in the midst of her problems?

It's interesting when John the Baptist was preparing the way for Jesus - preaching repentance - various people came to him and said what should we do?

We read in Luke 3 v12 -14 - his response –.

12 Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. 14 Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely--be content with your pay."

Nothing spectacular said here! - you know like give up your job (tax collecting was frowned upon) 'you can't possibly serve God being a tax collector / a Roman soldier - stop doing what you're doing and come follow Me'

No – **just 'be content with what you get'** – do what you're supposed to do - but do it well, do it properly, do it honestly and that's what God calls us to do; to be faithful where we are - to 'Brighten the corner where you are'. You can find this 'contentment' exactly where you are, because that's where God has put you.

Another big barrier to this contentment is covetousness - the definition of covetousness is..."a greedy desire to have more"

Proverbs 14:30. "A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot".

It's something we are all prone to do! It's the opposite of contentment because it's sets our 'hearts striving'— human nature (as we said earlier) often wants to have - what we don't have!

I have to continually check my covetousness time and time again, when I go out for a walk looking at bigger houses, or newer cars but God says ;

Hebrews 13:5 - . Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

I read a story the other day about a Jewish man in Hungary who went to his rabbi and complained, "Life is unbearable. There are nine of us living in one room. What can I do?" The rabbi answered, "Take your goat into the room with you." The man was incredulous, but the rabbi insisted, "Do as I say and come back in a week."

A week later the man returned looking more distraught than before. "We can't stand it," he told the rabbi. "The goat is filthy." The rabbi said, "Go home and let the goat out, and come back in a week." A week later the man returned, radiant, exclaiming, "Life is beautiful. We enjoy every minute of it now that there's no goat—and there's only the nine of us!" (*Reader's Digest*)

But what its saying is; we don't appreciate what we've got, realise how well off we are, how blessed we are, until it's gone! or we experience a contrast of fortunes.

I was in hospital years ago with eczema I thought I had it bad but some of the poor fellows in there made we realise. How blessed I really was. I came out with a new perspective.

So how do we get to this place of contentment well firstly?

As Paul says 'he learnt it' and dare I say this contentment comes with age and experience there are no 'short cuts'.

And I don't pretend to have learnt it yet or that I have that 'silver bullet' that will allow you to find it - but here's 3 things that I believe may help in reaching that place of contentment in the Lord;

The primary and most important one is (and I've said it before) put God first place in your life and everything else as secondary

"Where your treasure is, your heart will be" (Matt. 6:21) and if your treasure is in Jesus you will find contentment.

Matthew 6:31-33

“Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you”.

If we are going to strive or be covet anything it should be our relationship with the Lord - channel all your desires, wants, ambitions, goals into **‘knowing Him’ more.**

Secondly giving ‘Thanks & Praise’ is the greatest single thing we can do to cultivate contentment

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”()

Something Graham said to me last week, I found particularly moving; he said he was here at CBC to “give thanks to God because he has given him a new lease of life”. What a great reason to come to church.

I think giving ‘praise and thanks’ completely alters **our** perspective on things, it also completely dumfounds the devil who wants us to be discouraged, wants us to slide into the ‘slough of despond’, slip into a discontentment with our lot and our circumstances.

Let’s get this straight though; this ‘thanks and praise’ were talking about here is not a ‘don’t worry be happy’ sort of attitude, it’s much deeper than that, we are giving praise and thanks to God who is completely faithful ‘who is in control of our circumstances’, who is ‘working all things together for good’ (Rom 8; 28)

Even when we reach the point of Habakkuk 3

Habakkuk 3 17-18

“Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
¹⁸**yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Saviour”.**

But finally this is the ‘positive caveat’ to all this; we will never fully find contentment here this side of eternity as Edwin’s song says ‘this world is not our home’ our home is in heaven.

As CS Lewis put it;

“If I find **in myself** a desire which **no experience** in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation **is that** I was made for another world.” (Mere Christianity)

We are designed and created for another world.

This is where we will find true contentment; Rev 21:3-4

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes,’ and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the former things have passed away”.

Amen

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